

Conference 2007

Web 2.0

The first session of the BIG Conference, held in Chepstow from 16-18 May 2007, was a corker. It was the perfect way to start a conference, with its theme of 'Challenging the Status Quo'. **Kathy Hurst** chaired in front of the usual expectant first day full house, which only looked mildly hung over from the excesses of the night before.

The title 'Web 2.0' has now become accepted shorthand for the new kind of internet we all want as consumers: one with which we can interact, to which we can contribute and which we can control. Whether we, as market researchers, want to extend this enfranchisement to our respondents, and how we optimise the research potential of this new and exciting (frightening) web in Business to Business research was explored in full by the three speakers.

The keynote speaker was **Ray Poynter** of *The Future Place* on 'What does Web 2.0 mean for B2B?' To start with he gave us a few figures to concentrate our minds on the size of the user base and the level of their interaction with the web. Apparently 70% of 16 – 24 year olds use some kind of social networking site and LinkedIn (the site for business networking) has a membership of 10 million (I checked this latter fact this morning and they are now claiming 11 million!). He also gave us a brisk run through some of the ways in which big business was already successfully using their customers to participate in the development process. Particularly fascinating was a methodology called Co-Creation where the customer effectively decides the company's strategy by describing/designing a new product or voting for existing designs, which the company then produces and sells. He also mentioned the growth (aided by the omnipresence of the camera phone) of citizen journalism and the fiasco of the Number 10 website. He made the point that we can no longer keep the research process hidden from these fully empowered users and that we need to relate to those whose knowledge we seek to share in a completely new way.

Helpfully he also gave us a checklist of things we need to know about Web 2.0 and he reminded us that our business would never be the same again.

The other two papers concentrated more on a specific area which Ray had covered: that of blogs and other forms of social interaction on the web. The first of these Blogs, logs and socialising in cyber space: research in the world of Web 2.0' given by **Amanda Scott** and **Caroline Oates** of *Freshminds* gave us some pretty exciting visuals: one featuring dropping a Mintos mint into a large bottle of Diet Coke and the explosion that resulted. The real importance of the footage was to show how quickly the discovery of the effect was disseminated and the equal speed with which the Coca Cola Company turned what could have been a PR disaster into further advertising for the company.

They also showed us the business potential of conducting groups, with difficult to reach respondents, in virtual spaces such as Second Life (although isn't market research one of the things that people are fleeing from in their first life?) and other tools such as Respondent as questioner, Collaborative intelligence and Online communities. They gave us clear examples of areas where these techniques could benefit the researcher such as more full participation, ability to "play" with the brand, respondent empowerment, the sheer volume of online information, and of course cost.

Like Ray they also mentioned some of the downsides, like biases both from the sample base and from the impact of influencers, and that blogs needed constant monitoring.

Tools for which were the topic for the third speaker **Pravin Shekar** of *Dexterity KPO Services* on 'Blog research in the B2B space'. Like the other speakers Pravin gave us some entertaining examples of what is going on in Web 2.0 now. However, he also had some tools to deal with it. He mentioned both shareware and proprietorial software which could be used for blog/web mining, clustering, associations and sequential analysis. He also used an

acronym which I for one hadn't heard before WIBNI (Wouldn't it be nice if.....). Apparently blog mining is the answer to this kind of blue sky question when asked by a client.

All of these presentations were fascinating and I can heartily recommend reading the papers in full [contact Pene Healey on how to obtain a copy]. All gave the audience a great deal of information to take away about the huge potential of the web for gathering information on a literally global scale. They were all similarly cautious in their attitudes to the reliability of the data thus collected.

One question from the floor was "*Are these techniques complimentary or revolutionary?*" The consensus among the panel was – "*We won't have very long to wait before we find out!*"